The COMMONWEAL

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Difference and Truth

WHAT do you know about Japs? Chinamen? Very few of them have read Plato—very few of us have, either, for that matter. A few more, but still very few, have read the New Testament or the Old. They participate in the wisdom of an East that is further East than our own. They differ, even in looks they differ, among each other and from each other. Bishop Yu Pin is a great big man—well over six feet. Chiang Kai-shek is a little man. So is Mr. Kurusu. That much we know.

Human suffering does not seem to trouble them very much, nor yet death, except that they compensate for their lack of interest in that event by a deep interest in those who have died, after they have died, and a long time after. They are family people and like children, especially the Japanese. And both are interested in flowers. There are a lot of both of them, and a lot more Chinamen than Japs. And they are all very clever people.

That is the sort of thing we know about them—if we know anything. Obviously this sort of knowing is very different from real knowing. Much of it is probably simply not true, much of it is truth reshaped by the Hearns, the Pounds, the Fenollosas, the travelers and the missionaries and the orientalists and the diplomats and the business men and the officers of the Yangtze patrol, the salt gabelle. We don't really *know* even as much as we "know" about France or Germany or England—or they about us; and how little that is can painfully be learned by reading European popular books on America. It is a question, even, if the technical men in the State, Navy, War Departments know much more; we can only hope they do, for the decision of Pacific war and peace hangs on them far more than on the public.

They give every appearance of being realistic about it all—of acting in terms of our own long-range self-interest as they conceive it rather than in terms of what is best for these peoples we know so little about; and that is—sadly enough—as it must be. On this ground difference of opinion can center on something still complex, but something on which we are infinitely better fitted to form an opinion—the possible effect of possible events in the Far East on our own national future. Senator Wheeler thinks they can't have much effect. If we go to war against Japan, it will only be to benefit the British Empire, says he. Walter Lippmann goes whole hog the other way—that we must, as a duty of prudence, keep Japan and China separate, and China as friendly as possible to us. To pursue that policy logically—and it seems to be the policy we are now pursuing—means three alternatives: Japan backs down as far as we think she should back down; the present state of tension is allowed to drag on to another crisis; we go to war with Japan. And then there is Hitler.

What of the moral question? That pushes us back into our ignorance. There is evidence—and a lot of it—that Chiang Kai-shek's government has a large measure of popular support; the vast numbers of refugees, of Chinese ordinary people who have risked flight before the advancing Japanese rather than accept to remain under their rule, is as good evidence as any. Yet we still are ignorant, and as much or more harm can be done by going to war for someone's else good or democracy as by keeping out. We tried saving democracy in Europe 25 years ago.

Emotionally the pull is toward noble deeds at great distances; intellectually the pull is toward safeguarding our own future. The first is a dangerous pull; the second can turn into mere imperialism and selfishness. In this case, at least, our national decision will rest far more with the cold blooded than the warm; that is probably a blessing.

Shall the Churches Discuss the War?

EVERY WAR, and indeed most national political crises, have shown not only that the prevailing divisions of opinion in this country operate within religious groups, but also that there is much disagreement and down-right confusion as to the function of religious leaders. There are groups and sectaries who identify civic choice and religious obligation on almost every occasion— as some of our laws and much of our lobbying testify. But among a larger body there is a sense,

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more or less dimly apprehended, that civic decisions are the domain of the individual conscience; that religion should teach the moral principles whereby decisions are to be made, but generally not their specific application; that a clergyman stands not only for himself but also for religion, and hence when he urges a particular decision is in danger of encroaching on private moral rights.

The recent Gallup poll on whether clergymen should discuss from their pulpits American involvement in the current war reveals these historical cleavages in all our religious bodies, and also perhaps suggests developments of more recent origin. Of those canvassed, the Institute of Public Opinion reveals that 11 percent were neutral or indifferent, 34 percent wanted the clergy to deal with the question officially, and 55 percent did not want them to do so.

The 34 percent are presumably composed of those in whom the Puritan and Evangelical leaven works to give an uncomplicated vision of life, in which politics is virtually an object of religious conviction. One-fifth of this group want the clergy to advocate staying out of the war, 12 percent of them want the clergy to advocate involvement, 11 percent (whose wider horizon perhaps removes them from this general category) want the clergy to discuss the peace needed after the war, 9 percent want national unity and defense stressed, and 5 percent say the clergy "should say frankly and openly whatever they believe." The negative implications of this last opinion and of the small fraction voicing it are perhaps not so serious as might at first appear. It is not likely that the voters of the divisions described before would deny that the clergy may state their opinions "frankly and openly"; these voters are presumably giving their own interpretation of what is right, not interdicting the clergy's.

But the wording of their reply indicates the indefiniteness and subjectiveness into which much American religious thinking has lapsed. The same is true in even greater measure of the 55 percent of the total canvass who voted against any clerical discussion of the war. The report (New York *Times*) mentions no reasons based upon civic conscience or temporal rights, but quotes as "primary" these arguments: the church is a "spiritual escape," a place for "peace and comfort." If this means that the spiritual is above the temporal, that the church is a place for recharging the soul with living truth, such belief in itself invites no controversy, though this is a too-narrow application of it. But if it means, as it seems to mean, the opposite excess to the one noted in the analysis above: if it means that religion has nothing to do with objective reality, it is a serious symptom. Not for nothing, the Kremlin may say, have we called religion the opiate of the people.

Grenville Vernon

GRENVILLE VERNON, the drama critic of THE COMMONWEAL, died suddenly of a heart attack the night of November 30. Mr. Vernon had been writing for this magazine since its early days, in 1926, and he took over the theater column in the fall of 1934.

Most readers of THE COMMONWEAL know Mr. Vernon principally for the column he has written weekly: for his intelligent and sensitive criticism, his remarkable knowledge of the stage and its literature and of the host of actors, writers, producers and other workers who have given the plays of New York since he came to this city in 1905. We believe Mr. Vernon has served his readers with rare ability and great charm, and we are confident that no critic of the period has served the stage better. And no actor or actress, whether old or young, in fashion or out of fashion, could have had a more sympathetic critic, always aware of the full and great art of acting, consistently applying a high standard to theatrical performance, and with no exception ever: gracious and friendly—always for the person.

As the articles and book reviews which Mr. Vernon also contributed to THE COMMONWEAL indicate, his interests and abilities were not limited to the theater. Indeed, his career was an unusually broad one. He was a novelist, a writer of many plays, for ten years editor of the Dial Press, and for thirteen years music critic for the New York *Times* and *Tribune*. Music, perhaps, was Mr. Vernon's "major field"—the opera, concerts, the ballet, and the musicians and artists who make them live. During the twenties, he served as a foreign correspondent in London and Paris, and this past year he had been preparing a biography of Gladstone, the English statesman. It was a full and rich career of a rare writer and critic and journalist. THE COMMONWEAL will always be aided and honored by his association and by his interest in and work for its welfare.

We are sorrowful at the death of Grenville Vernon because of his work and his career, but more personally because of what he was. It is impossible to judge how fully this showed in his writing, but as a man to know, Grenville Vernon was all kindliness and tolerance and encouragement. He was a modest man: of faith, of judgment and objectivity, of experience and humor, with all the qualities implied in the term gentleman. He loved New York and his native state of Rhode Island with patriotism and a mature understanding, and he was deeply concerned for the country. He was one who does, not in a way to impose upon anyone, but with the reticence of clear vision and modesty, actually represent the best part of our civilization—a civilization that would be poor indeed if his goodness were lost with his death.

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A Policy: II

HERE is another disk, NBC, which you would be well advised to play on your gramophone for the French in France:

"Listen, please listen, dear father, this time. That tune we kept playing, 'The Fall of France,' the brassy one orchestrated by emigrés and ignorance on the theme, contempt for a nation which only fought and lost, contempt for its institutions and for its spirit, that tune is out. And that other tune 'Invitation to Revolt' is out too. We have stopped giving prizes, sending people to the dunce's corner. We are bewildered—and the other words—because there are hardly any nations left for us to mobilize, encourage and applaud. We are bewildered because airplanes are coming off the line, and tanks, and we look at posters saying 'Keep 'Em Flying,' but who is going to fly them and it may well be that Americans are going to fly them which, as you know, would make it a war. So that all we say now to you about the fighting is that if we come into the war you will probably hear about it, the fact will be mentioned, our light will not be hidden under a bushel. And if some day the Germans take off their uniforms and stop paying salaries to their police all over Europe, and if one day there are no more Germans in your streets, you will know that too, you will find that out all by yourselves, we will not have to tell you about it. And then of course we know that you have brains enough and courage and experience enough in all the forms to make a new form in which French people may live, yet which permits other people to live. But if things do not go so well, if the Germans stay in uniform, and in Paris, and if one day the news get round that there is a sort of arrangement and we have pulled in our horns, then you will know about that too. So, all in all, we have stopped pleading with you to wait until we have caught up.

"We are broadcasting to inform you that we no longer think we can win the war by telling you what you ought to do, nor do we feel authorized to tell you what to do. We recognize your right to do what you think best. We feel much closer to you than when you were fighting and we were applauding, for now we also have to determine, not through slogans but in act and serious purpose, our relationship with German might and Japanese determination, and whether we will fight to assure our own interests or whether we still are moved by some consideration for yours. It is true that we still have the possibility to fight and win—or fight and lose, or not fight at all, but wait—but no matter what we do, the old order is dead, Malbrough, and buried, and we, like you, have to meet the real and restless forces of the future.

"It is the same night and the same dawn over France and over America. We enjoy, of course, relative freedom of choice while you are suffering the comparative fatality of imprisonment: all of us are expectant and uncertain. We do not know what we can do, nor what control we may obtain over events: we have lost our taste for promising the moon. It is in uncertainty now that we are more closely than ever bound to you, in the common expectancy of fear and hope that we are fraternally united. No stronger than you in spirit, untested in your trials, we are the weak supporting the weak, the blind leading the blind—perhaps to Breughel's ditch, and if we appeal to you to remain with us in this human condition, if we pledge our refusal ever to break the bonds that unite us—even while supplying de Gaulle now and fighting, soon perhaps, against your troops—if from our stocks of 1,156,000,000 bushels of wheat, we pledge to send you food at once, and throughout the war, and after the war—win or lose—it is not to keep your courage up: it is to keep up our own.

"For it is only through your ports and through your hearts, and through the ruined streets of your towns, and through your minds that we can insist that this war be related to human reality. It is only through your dismay, your fatigue, your contact with your conqueror, your resistance to his will, your submission to his will, your evaluation of his will, that we can still measure this war and know what it is about.

"Those of us who wanted our country to defend your country against the invader—but who never promised that our help would come in time—thought in the habitual terms of nation and state, in the old terms which placed nation against nation and allied nation to nation. We now look beyond the nation, beyond the state at the revolutionary turmoil of the world and at the French people at the center of that strain. We are beginning to see that this war, which is changing all the old forms, is no longer a war to save the old forms. In the invention of the new form, which will save men from subservience to anything but to the destiny for which they were created, our search, and our power, must be united and informed by your search and your weakness. There is this ocean between us and the ships that do not sail, the clipper reserved for officials and the shameless rich, this silence between us and the difference in time, so that we cannot even walk step by step together through the day. If we break with you, if we do not pursue our search through the war, and beyond the war, in communion with you, if we break with Europe, then this war, which was to bring men into a new, mobile and supple unity, will serve only to create great continental units intent on defense, intent on conquest."

C. G. PAULDING.

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The Real Devil of the Theater

The trouble with the American stage.

By Grenville Vernon

IF THE American theater has not yet entered the valley of the shadow, it is fast approaching it. Yet only a decade ago it was hailed as the most vigorous, most progressive, most original theater in the world. In direction, scenic design, in acting it was supreme; and what was more important it was nourished by a continuous outpouring of new and vital plays by young but already world-famous dramatists. It had Eugene O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, Philip Barry, Robert Sherwood, S. N. Behrman, Sidney Howard and Elmer Rice; from whom had recently come "Strange Interlude" and "Mourning Becomes Electra," "Elizabeth of England" and "Mary the Queen," "Holiday" and "Paris Bound," "The Road to Rome" and "Reunion in Vienna," "The First Man" and "Brief Moment," "The Silver Cord" and "Lucky Sam McCarver," "The Adding Machine" and "Street Scene." A couple of years later O'Neill gave us "Days Without End" and "Ah Wilderness"; Anderson followed with "Winterset," "High Tor" and "The Masque of Kings"; Sherwood with "Idiot's Delight"; and Behrman with "Biography" and "End of Summer." To atone for the fact that neither Howard nor Rice had produced anything worth while, two new dramatists appeared: Lillian Hellman with "The Children's Hour," and Clifford Odets with "Awake and Sing."

So even six years ago we thought we were in the midst of a dramatic renaissance. It was short-lived indeed! O'Neill has been silent; Howard is dead; Rice has become pedestrian; Barry has produced only one really worth while play, "Here Come the Clowns." Sherwood has given us his play on Lincoln and that on Finland, both of which owed their success to their subjects and their sincerity rather than to any interpretive originality. Behrman has shown a distinct flagging of invention, and Odets has repeated his old formula and characters with less vitality. Miss Hellman has continued her promise with "The Little Foxes"; her latest play, "The Watch on the Rhine," like Mr. Sherwood's succeeding because of its subject. One new talent, and only one, has revealed itself—that of William Saroyan.

In a recent article in *Harper's* Professor Walter Prichard Eaton argues that the decline of the theater is due chiefly to the spirit informing its audiences. His thesis is that a play to interest an audience must deal with a theme in which there are generally accepted standards of manners, conduct or belief. In a serious play the dramatist may either attack or defend these standards; in a comedy he may set them forth wittily or humorously; but either in serious play or comedy these standards must be a vital part of the social fabric. Professor Eaton points out that many standards once generally accepted are now considered outmoded by a large part of the public. This is particularly true of the metropolitan outlook on marriage and sexual morality, two fields which were once the drama's happy hunting grounds. And as the American theater is today largely confined to metropolitan New York, it is easy to see what the effect has been upon the theater.

In all this Professor Eaton is on firm ground. The infiltration of ethical and moral solvents following the collapse of religious authority has left large portions of our people unresponsive to serious drama dealing with long established moral laws or traditions. The weakening of social forms and amenities which is a corollary of the disintegrating social structure has rendered them insensitive to the subtle distinctions of manners and behavior which is the stuff of comedy.

It is true that the problems raised by the war furnish new material for the dramatist, but the war is too close for us to obtain the perspective needed for great drama. Art, as Wordsworth said, is "emotion remembered in tranquillity." So it is that those themes with a common interest to the great mass of theater-goers have become greatly lessened in number.

Professor Eaton's diagnosis of the evil afflicting the American theater is a spiritual one, and it is a diagnosis which under the present economic condition of the theater is basic and just. Is not, however, the real evil the economic condition itself; a situation false, artificial, and artistically idiotic? If this condition were corrected, would not the evil which Professor Eaton so ably depicts be itself wiped out? Have not the themes possible for the theater diminished in number because of the economic demands of play production, demands which are becoming progressively more difficult to meet? This condition does not obtain in the other literary arts. The novelist is not

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restricted in his themes, nor the essayist, nor the poet; they are not because it is not necessary for them to appeal to audiences of colossal size, the members of which have excellent balances at the bank. They *can* write for the unintelligent or the seekers after sensation, but they don't have to; a small public is sufficient to assure publication of their work.

But in the theater of today a huge audience is a *sine qua non* of success, and unless a manager thinks a play will appeal to such an audience he won't even consider its production. Except in a few cases where a single set and a cast of low salaried actors may allow it to stagger along, a play must be a smash hit. Yet often the finest plays appeal to a limited public, and there is certainly no reason why in a normal economic set-up a play which draws four or five thousand dollars a week should be forced to close. But to continue today a play must usually take in at least double that amount. The high cost of play production makes it obligatory.

The first reason for the high cost of play production is a heritage from the Iroquois fire. As a result of the burning thirty-five years ago of that Chicago theater a law was passed in New York prohibiting a theater from being a part of a building devoted to other uses. Though this law has now been repealed, practically every legitimate theater in New York was built under this restriction. This means that the theater alone must pay all the carrying charges of the building, without the aid of any renting of apartments or offices. Moreover as a theater is rarely occupied for more than eight months a year, the rental obtained for that period must suffice for the whole twelve months. To these handicaps an exorbitant rent is a corollary. The minimum weekly rental of a New York theater is today $2,000, but this is only the beginning. The house usually demands 35 percent of the gross intake up to $10,000, and 30 percent between that and $15,000, with a graduated decrease in the percentage after that amount. But this is not all. There is usually a stop-clause set at a minimum specified intake, usually $6,000 to $8,000, which permits the landlord to cancel his lease if at the end of a week the play doesn't gross the specified sum. The result is that no producer, unless he rents the theater by the year, is sure of being able to keep his play running, even though he is making a profit. Of course this situation exists chiefly in New York, but as the American theater is today entirely controlled by and largely limited to New York, it is a situation which is vital.

But the rent problem is only the first, even if it is the greatest of the play-producer's woes. There comes next the problem of the stage-hands, or rather of the stage-hands' union. It would be useless to go into the demands and requirements—they are legion—of this union, an organization whose head has just been convicted of racketeering in company with his chief lieutenant who was formerly a panderer. Some of its demands are merely annoying, such as its refusal to permit anyone except a stage-hand to move the smallest stage prop, and its wage scale might not be considered exorbitant, taking into consideration the number of weeks of probable employment. But the union's demands as to the number of men to be employed are preposterous and often disastrous. Practically every producer is forced to employ double the number of stage-hands needed. In fact in a one-set play all they have to do is to raise and lower the curtain. The charge that in many plays the stage-hands spend most of their time playing pinochle is no joke. For this laborious work they receive considerably more than the average actor! Now while the stage-hands' demands are not vital in the case of plays taking in large sums at the box-office, they are often fatal to plays of moderate intake. Each season many worthy plays either fail after a short run or are never produced at all because of the absurd requirements of the stage-hands' union.

The same criticism applies to the scenic artists' union. No artist is allowed to design a set who is not a member of the union. He must receive a minimum of $500 for the design of the first set and of $250 for each succeeding set. This is in addition to the sets themselves, which under union demands rarely cost less than $1,500 each. There are many excellent artists not members of the union because they are unable to pay the high admission fee, who would be glad to turn out a set for a third of the prices now charged. The scenic artists' union refuses to allow these men to make a living. This again, while only an annoyance to the producer of large resources, often prevents one of moderate means from giving a play he is interested in, especially when the play requires more than one set. And then there are of course the equally extravagant demands of the musicians' union, if there is music in the play or between the acts. From an artistic viewpoint the situation is preposterous, from an economic one lamentable.

And this is where the vicious circle completes itself; the high cost of production, besides limiting the number and type of plays, also limits the audience. The average man or woman is utterly unable to pay the admission prices made necessary by the cost of production. Moreover the very people to whom the theater appeals as an art are among those unable to pay the present admission prices. Those who are making and therefore spending money are not the sort to whom things of the mind and the spirit appeal. They want to be amused, and amusement to them means a pretty obvious brand of emotion or fun, and they are certainly not interested in intellectual probings. And these people, the ones able to pay the present

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theater prices, are equally very little likely to accept the old standards of morals and manners, the passing of which is limiting the sort of play that can be given. Of course there are plays which succeed because they are patronized by people who either hold to or understand the old standards. Go for instance to "Life with Father," and you will see an audience utterly unlike those of the usual Broadway show. To attend this play most of the audience has submitted to considerable financial sacrifice. But people will do this for only a play or two a year; the rest of the time they will pay their forty or sixty cents and go to a movie. Thus it is that the high cost of production causes the high price of tickets, and the high cost of tickets limits the type of audience and therefore the type of play. It is the high cost of play production rather than any basic lack of themes that is the chief devil in the American theater today, and if the theater is to mean anything to the present generation it must charge admission prices that the average intelligent person can afford.

In the first place then the rent problem in New York must be solved, and the only way to do it is by the complete reconstruction of the present theater buildings. They must be remodeled so that apartments and offices can bear a portion of the carrying charges. The effect will be felt from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The number of Broadway plays will be increased, and this will increase the number of plays outside the metropolis. Moreover as the cities outside New York believe in many things Broadways considers outmoded, producers will be willing to take chances with a greater variety of themes, and the restriction of themes being less, still more plays will be given. Thus will be completed, not a vicious, but a salutary circle.

But the stage-hands, the scenic artists and the musicians must play their part. They must cooperate. Today it is only the actor and the playwright who ever takes a cut in salary or royalty so that the play may go on. The stage-hands, the scenic artists, and the musicians always demand their pound of flesh. They are apparently interested in the theater only as a place to make money, not realizing that they would make more money if they would permit more plays to be given and for longer runs. The irony of it is that the only people really necessary for play giving are the producers, actors and playwrights. Between them they are perfectly capable of giving all but the most scenically complicated plays. The actors, however, by forming themselves into a union have rendered this impossible. Despite the abuses it has rectified, the theater today might well be better off if there were no Actors' Equity Association. Its demands for its own members have been modest and just, but being a branch of the American Federation of Labor it must support any action taken by the stage-hands or musicians, no matter how deleterious they may be to play giving and therefore to the interests of the actor. The actor today is the goat. Paid on the average less than a stage-hand, very much less than a stage-carpenter or electrician, he is moreover a goat without any horns to defend himself. The playwright is in better case, for the Dramatists' Guild is not affiliated with any labor union. If the Actors' Equity Association seceded from the AFL and united with the Dramatists' Guild, it would occupy a far more logical position than it does at present, and moreover ought to be able to enforce its requirements without injuring the art it is interested in. For only the actor and the playwright, and in rare instances the producer, are interested in the theater as an art.

One great obstacle, however, looms in the path—the basic stupidity of many of the producers, a stupidity which the more literate among them label as their rugged individualism. These producers are all shooting for the jack-pot. They are unwilling to reduce admission prices even when it is economically possible because they know if a play is a smash hit they can charge what they wish. But in this their greed only drives away possible audiences by the hundreds of thousands. To win in one play they are willing to sacrifice a dozen. It is as unsound economically as it is disastrous artistically. Yet the only salvation for the theater lies in cooperation between producer, actor and playwright. Until that cooperation begins, the possible themes for plays will continue to dwindle, and the plays and audiences with them. The first move must be made by the producers. By uniting to reconstruct the New York theaters they will eliminate excessive rents, and by abandoning their slavery to the smash hit and reducing the price of tickets they will bring back to the theater the audiences it has lost. Thus and thus only can the devil which is afflicting the American theater be finally exorcised.

To One Who Would Live Godly

Oh, quick! Before this sadness ends,
Offer it to Christ. For it will pass.
No sorrow stays, not even this.
Think, as you weep—impaled upon
The gibbet of a moment's pain, you
Do what Christ cannot: He suffers
Now no more in His own person.
Therefore, rejoice that you fill up
In you those things He wants
Of His own sufferings; that when
His peace descends to you, you may
Not see this as a moment spent
And wasted that might have held
The dignity of sacrament.

Don H. Dickinson.

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Producer Problems

One of America's most successful makes a case for his craft's being one of the hardest.

By **John Golden**

ASK any man what he thinks is the hardest job in the world—the job that requires the greatest amount of technical skill, that encounters the most stubborn obstacles, that entails exhausting the most expenditure of energy and meeting the most irritating handicaps—and he's pretty likely to answer that his own job is the one.

Wishing to show that I am more broadminded than the majority of my fellow-men, who would most probably give that answer, I will confess that my job of producing plays for the American stage is not the hardest job in the world. It's only the second hardest. The hardest job is one that I have also taken a shot at from time to time, and that is *writing* plays for the American stage.

This may seem a petty statement at a time when the fates of entire convoys of ships, of immense armies and whole nations, hang daily in the balance and the jobs of speeding armament production, safeguarding ships, armies and nations seem to offer almost insoluble problems. But I still believe that I am not being narrowly provincial to my own field when I stick to my statement that writing and producing plays are more difficult than any other jobs.

The war jobs are simple in the sense that any enterprise is simple where the way is clearly seen ahead and the only things needed for success are energy, determination and perseverance. The job of generals in the field and commanders on the sea is to utilize efficiently—with well-established, routine techniques—the machines and armaments their nations provide them. It's merely a matter of industrial production.

The Germans have no mysterious, God-given, unbeatable strategy; they have merely an extraordinary industrial productivity geared to war. When we shall manage to create an even greater industrial productivity geared to war, with which to supply the allies, the allies' military problems will be solved.

The creation of industrial productivity is a mechanical thing. It too follows established and routine techniques. Our engineers have long known how to make more and better automobiles than any other country. With plain energy, determination and perseverance they can make more and better tanks, planes, guns and ships. The natural resources for such armaments are at hand—the raw material and the labor. The path is straight.

But none of this is true in the theater. You can't make a die that will go on stamping out one play after another, the way a die will stamp out tens of thousands of airplane parts one after the other, all alike. In producing plays, you can have no formula, no pattern—there is never a precedent for any part of the process. You have to re-tool the entire plant, so to speak, for every item produced. It's as if an automobile plant changed its models not once a year, but for each and every car; worse, because an auto plant would only have to reset its dies and lathes and other tools for each car of a different model. It would not have to search for entirely new kinds of raw materials each time, say some new alloys or plastics, nor would it have to engage an almost entirely new set of workmen (and highly temperamental ones, at that) each time.

But the theater does. We can sometimes get away with using some little chair, or portion of scenery, twice over, in two successive plays, after they've been carefully disguised. But we can't keep the dialogue device, the successful entrance or exit, from one play and put it right into another. It all has to be new, the cast has to be new—and the problem of putting together all the complex elements (especially the personal elements) that make up a play, and making them fit and stay fitted, is all that remains the same.

The big point

The biggest point is this: In all the jobs of modern industry man is able to measure the value of what he is doing step by step as he does it. There are gauges and tests and statistical analyses to go by at every point. But in theatrical production you are in the dark until the job is done. Everything has to be achieved on the basis of your own fallible judgment. You must *guess* whether a script needs a different second act curtain, whether actor A can play a certain part better than actor B, whether it is wise to bring a play to Broadway in early fall before the rush of other plays, or in the middle of the rush of other plays later on. You can't stick a thermometer or any other measuring instrument into the mouth of a

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play and know to a decimal point how it's doing before it opens. The responsibility of making decisions on the basis of one's own private prejudices—and in the face of opposition from all one's associates and friends who have a different set of prejudices—is one of the major difficulties of production for the stage.

Still another difficulty is the unpredictable "opposition" that your product will meet. By that I mean the unpredictable taste of the audience and the critics for whom the play is intended. The taste of the public in mechanical iceboxes, the quality of tanks an enemy will put in the field against ours, are unpredictable too, it is true. But not entirely so. Those imponderables are somewhat measurable—there are at least *some* reliable precedents to go by.

But nobody can tell what the public taste in a play will be until after the job is done and it's too late to change it.

Industrialists today complain like spoiled children that they are facing—shortages! It's their first taste—and only a taste—of a constant condition in the theater. To be sure there *is* a shortage of copper, for example, but only a shortage, not a complete absence of it. It is still available by the ton, and the shortage has only begun to appear. In the past there were surpluses of it. But in the theater there has *always* been a shortage of the thing the theater lives by—talent. Rare thing that it is, it comes, if at all, by the single little piece—never by the ton.

The natural paucity of talent, which mankind has had to face throughout history, has been exaggerated in the theater by the rapacious robbing of its ranks by the motion pictures. Lo, the poor producer! He finds a young actor or playwright. He nurses him, coddles him, teaches him all the accumulated experience of his own career—gives him the benefit of all the assistance in his power—and presents him or his work before the public on Broadway. And then woe to the producer if his protegé is a success! For then he is kidnapped ruthlessly by motion picture companies of Hollywood who offer the young success fabulous sums of money, swimming pools, soft sunshine and daytime work so that he can spend his evenings like any good family man at his home before his own hearthside. The producer in this dilemma doesn't know whether to hope that the young people he displays are successes or failures in their first shot under his management.

To be sure, ten years later the successful young man or woman returns triumphantly from Hollywood to take a casual little fling at Broadway once more. But now his values have been entirely transformed. Five hundred dollars a week is merely a bellboy's tip to him. The rigorous routine of work to which theater people are accustomed is an outrageous imposition upon his energy. The movies may have developed now and then an artist of their own—a Garbo or a John Ford—but practically every other first rate writer, director or actor in motion pictures has been kidnapped from the stage, after learning his business on the stage.

There must be something fundamentally unsound about an art or technique when it is unable to develop its own upspringing young people, but has constantly to borrow them from its sister art, the theater.

The movies

Motion pictures are today, as they always have been, a voracious octopus that eats up Claudias as fast as they are born. After forty years, the motion pictures have yet to produce of themselves a great name comparable to that of Eugene O'Neill in the theater. They show the world a great deal of pulchritude, yes. They have many very beautiful young women appearing in quick succession—and disappearing in quick succession as their first youth fades—but acting as an art is something that has been rarely developed by motion pictures. Snared and utilized often, yes—developed seldom.

Any kind of writing ranks among the very hard jobs. But in most forms of authorship a writer is free to move about as he pleases. But a play is almost like a sonnet in the rigidity of its limitations. It must be at least two hours long, and never more than two-hours-and-a-half long. It must be told entirely by means of conversation and it cannot have one single boring second in it. Contrast this with a novel where the length may vary as the writer pleases, where dull spots can occur with great length and frequency, and it won't matter if there are also a few bright spots. Contrast it with radio or motion picture dialogue where the scenes may be shifted with a bar of music or the snip of a cutting-shears.

This is why there are fewer able playwrights today than there are able novelists, short-story writers, radio sketch writers, advertising copy writers, or motion picture story writers. There is still more money to be made from a successful play than from any other field of writing, but in view of the hardships and risks of playwrighting, I don't know that young writers today can be blamed for going into easier fields.

Play producing takes its place as the second hardest job, not only for some of the reasons given above, but also because play producing entails a certain amount of playwriting. That is, a producer worth his salt inevitably participates in the rewriting of a play. I am not attempting in the slightest to take away from the playwrights, with whom I have had such happy relations and who have brought me so many profitable hits, any of the credit for the plays they wrote. But nonetheless it is a fact that I have never produced a play

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whose script I did not mark up thoroughly with hundreds of suggestions—some of which the playwright gladly accepted, some of which he didn't—for a second revision, and then marked up that revision for a third, and so on, for month after month before the play finally went into rehearsal. I don't know how other producers work, but I think they also do the same.

And then there is the intangible, immeasurable thing called personality which is really the whole basis of the theater, for what the public comes to the theater for is always to see vibrant personalities perform on the stage before them. There is no instrument yet invented to gauge the power of a personality, as there are instruments to gauge the tensile strength of steel or the explosive power of dynamite. This is one of the most complex factors and one of the greatest difficulties of production.

But many of these problems will disappear—if the movies would only let us alone!

Hollywood Handles Dynamite

By FREDERIC SONDERN Jr. with C. NELSON SCHRADER

FROM Nome to Jacksonville, Hollywood's stars lay down the law on America's fashions, manners, speech and general behavior. Clark Gable leaves off his undershirt, and hundreds of thousands of would-be Gables discard theirs. Sonja Henie wears white skating shoes. A week after her picture is released every available pair in the country is sold out. Charles Boyer throatily orders pink champagne for Irene Dunne, and immediately restaurants all over the country are amazed by the demand for this exotic and little-known beverage. The tobacco industry discovered to its grief that when movie directors began putting cigars exclusively into the mouths of corrupt politicians, gangsters and other unattractive characters, the sale of cigars dropped sharply. Advertising experts give Popeye credit for much of the 40 percent increase in the sale of spinach. The social mannerisms of the stars may be seen in replica in country clubs and juke-box dance halls the nation over. Clark Gable's ogling leer and Myrna Loy's nose-wrinkling have become part of the American lexicon of expression. Just as the sparkling, elaborate bathroom, the one-handed telephone and the venetian blind—also inspired by Hollywood—have become prerequisites of the American home.

But these are only superficial symptoms of Hollywood's powers of suggestion. The movies, with equal ease, lead and change the nation's trends of thought on politics, morals and social questions of great importance. Every week approximately eighty-five million Americans go to the movies. Fifty million of them are under thirty and represent the most impressionable section of our population. Hollywood's pictures shape these malleable minds as can no newspaper, magazine or book.

The movie-goer, in the darkness of the theater, relaxed and undisturbed in a comfortable chair, gives such undivided attention to the screen as he never gives to the printed page. His entire consciousness is riveted on the flashing pictures. He lives himself into the picture. He identifies himself with one of the characters. And he receives impressions and has emotional experiences which leave memories almost as vivid as those of real life. The psychological conditions for putting ideas across to him, on anything from buying a new car to joining the air corps, are perfect.

Nelson Schrader, co-author of this article, made a test on audiences of the technicolor picture "Maryland," then playing at three New York theaters of various grades. Sixty percent of the people interviewed knew what color a particular automobile in the picture was, 40 percent knew it was a Packard. In another investigation 80 percent knew what brand of cigarettes Bing Crosby smoked in a certain picture.

Some wide-awake commercial firms realize this and have agreements with three highly successful promoters in the movie capital who have a virtual monopoly on getting plugs for manufacturers into the pictures. Western Union, Remington Rand, Lipton's Tea, the makers of Ritz crackers and of Bromo-Seltzer, among others, pay these agents high fees for each film in which their product is mentioned or used.

Some years ago, the Payne Fund instituted an exhaustive scientific study of the effects of movies on the minds of young people. Twelve outstanding psychologists spent almost two years at it, and did a monumental job. In one test, 4,000 high school students were questioned on their ideas of the Germans, the Chinese, the Negro, war, crime and capital punishment. They were then sent to see pictures which dealt with these peoples and problems. After several months, they were questioned again. It was found that the large majority had swung over to conform with the ideas presented by the pictures. Most of those who had, for example, written "*Most* Chinese are cunning and underhand" in their first quiz, wrote "*Few* Chinese are cunning and underhand"—after seeing "Son of the Gods," a film very favorable to that race. "All Quiet on the Western Front" changed the hatred of many for the Germans to tolerance and even liking. The investigators found that in most cases such a shift of sentiment was permanent, especially if reinforced by other movies with the same underlying theme. In recent years Dr. Gallup's poll-takers, some of the big advertising

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firms and various educational groups have taken up where the Payne Fund left off in the analysis of the movie-goer's mind. And some of their records are startling.

The experts find that, in general, the average spectator believes that the scenes and characters he sees in a movie are actually authentic or typical of possible situations and people. Trained interviewers have buttonholed thousands of members of various types of audience on leaving their theaters, and asked each whether he or she thought that certain scenes in the picture they had seen were true to life. This "belief test" has yielded some startling results. Ninety percent of a large cross-section of movie-goers thought that "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," melodramatic fiction that it was, gave an accurate picture of the United States Senate. So profound, incidentally, was the effect of the picture—which showed a gallant scout-master elected to the Senate battling the corrupt politicians of the Capitol—in the congressional district of which the community of Shamrock, Texas, is the center that the Boy Scouts of that district were able to campaign *their* scoutmaster, 31-year-old Gene Worley, into the House of Representatives. In a similar investigation, 65 percent believed that "Down Argentine Way" —a very inaccurate and lamentable product of Hollywood's wildest imagination and bad taste—showed the Argentines as they really are. And it continually amazes army and navy morale officers to find that a great many people actually believe that admirals, generals, top-sergeants and petty officers are like those who appear in the Abbott and Costello comedies. "Oh, you're not at all like the sergeant I saw in the movies" is a very common remark made by mothers who visit their sons in the camps to polite young men with three chevrons on their arms.

Beside the officers of the armed forces, Hollywood has done serious damage to a number of other American institutions. Over a period of years, the movie studios have regularly portrayed the newspaper publisher as an unscrupulous politician, the city editor as a noisy neurotic and the reporter as a drunken bum. The newspaper office on the screen is inevitably a bedlam of confusion, and as such the public at large has come to regard it. Competent authorities in the advertising field lay much of the blame for the public's decreasing confidence in its newspapers—so devastatingly demonstrated in *Fortune's* poll of August, 1939—at Hollywood's door.

Another sufferer is America's commercial and private aviation. The average American is still not air-minded. The nation's air lines have expanded very slowly and huge sections of the country have yet to be opened to regular traffic. Private flying is still in its infancy, not because of expense, but because of fear. The advertising people are very sure of that. And Hollywood, in picture after picture, year after year, has identified the airplane with fear, suspense and disaster. "Test Pilot," "Flight Command," "Forced Landing" are just a few recent examples of this tendency. There are a few exceptions like "China Clipper," which did Pan American Airlines a lot of good, but the airplane crash is one of Hollywood's favorite thrill-makers, and directors like to build up and drag out to the limit the suspense during the actual flight that precedes it. Watch the faces, some time, of an audience that is following such a sequence, and see their horrified fascination as the pilot shaves the side of a hangar on a fog-bound field. The average man, the researchers have found, will leave the theater after such a film inclined to travel henceforth by rail or road.

The nazis have long realized the impact of movies on the national life. Movie theaters have been built and subsidized by the nazi government throughout the Reich—in the smallest of towns—to form a network over which the Propaganda Ministry can disseminate what it believes to be the most powerful publicity medium in existence. Berlin has found that the effect of visual propaganda is instantaneous and lasts much longer than any other kind. Shortly before Munich, for example, at the height of Germany's rearmament effort, the Gestapo found that the average German was not sufficiently conscious of the existence of espionage within the Reich. Secrets were being given away to foreign tourists at an alarming rate. Gestapo chief Himmler took his problem to Dr. Goebbels. And the UFA, Germany's largest film concern, turned out a picture designed to stop every German from telling anything of military importance to a foreigner. It worked like magic. Goebbels and the UFA experimented further, and finally reached perfection with two films—"Baptism of Fire" and "War in the East"—showing the annihilation of Poland, which were circulated in Belgium, Holland and the Balkans before the *blitz* of 1940 began. They were a very important factor in the "softening" of those countries. Now there is at least one moving picture photographer with every German regiment in the field. And their newsreels, carefully cut to include only the most favorable commentary on the German soldiers' life, are—in the opinion of foreign observers—one of the most stimulating morale builders that the Germans have.

Back in 1917, Hollywood, with comparatively limited facilities and crude technique, performed propagandistic miracles in conditioning this country for war. "The Battle Cry of Peace," showing the invasion of the United States by the Kaiser's troops, drew enormous audiences all over the country. And George Mock, in his authoritative "Words That Won the War," gives this movie credit for swinging a considerable portion of

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American public sentiment to the Allied cause. Under George Creel's Division of Films of the Committee of Public Information—the official government propaganda and censorship agency of the last war—Hollywood produced a series of shockers which rocked the nation. "Pershing's Crusaders," "The Prussian Cur," "To Hell with the Kaiser" and "The Kaiser, the Beast of Berlin" put their audiences in a fighting mood, which, as Creel realized, no lectures or books on German atrocities could have duplicated.

After the propaganda effort of the last war was over, Hollywood went into reverse. There followed a series of pictures which did almost as much as the war itself to make the mass of the American people hate everything military. Movie audiences became familiar with the slime and filth of the trenches, with the sight of men and animals blown to bits, with the racking fear of the "zero hour." "The Big Parade" was a harrowing story of doughboys returning from France to find their jobs gone and nothing but misery awaiting them at home. A host of similar powerful films conditioned the country for peace.

Hollywood was slow for a long time to change that trend and to attack the dictatorships in any way. European markets were attractive and not to be thrown away for the sake of ideology. The first, tentative try was "Confessions of a Nazi Spy," the story of espionage in this country. But that was a poor draw at the box office; and so were "Mortal Storm" and "Escape," both bitter indictments of nazi brutality and oppression. The studios were lukewarm, and it was only after Charlie Chaplin made profits with "The Great Dictator" that they began to change their attitude. Now, the wave is rising. "Underground," "Manhunt," "Sergeant York" and other similarly belligerent films have been successful and the Hollywood executives are beginning to see box-office receipts in stories pertaining to the European war. "A Yank in the R.A.F." is a beginning, and more films of the same type are in production.

The power of Hollywood's movies to mold the nation's thinking, and how to direct that power, has become a major worry to the various agencies of the federal government which are responsible for maintaining this country's morale in the coming tempestuous years. A sub-committee of the United States Senate recently began investigating the motion-picture industry's influence on the war sentiment of the American people. But the hearings rapidly degenerated into a mud-slinging political battle between Washington's interventionist and isolationist factions. The public lost interest and the investigation slid from page one to the back columns and oblivion. The pertinent facts of Hollywood's propaganda influence never made print.

If Spencer Tracy or Mickey Rooney can skyrocket the sales of a beverage by asking for "a coke" in their pictures, responsible officials in Washington feel that warlike speeches from them can very easily whip this country into a frenzy for a war for which the country is not yet, by a long shot, prepared. And these same experts feel that while exciting the country on foreign issues, the Hollywood magnates have done nothing to build the faith of the nation in itself and its destiny. There has not been a single film which has shown the American people the seriousness of the situation that is facing them. And a war, according to Hollywood, would be a light matter interspersed with a few attractive spies, some uniformed and singing sisters that encourage the boys to do their bit, and a few nazis that turn tail when they see a bayonet.

Serious men in Washington believe that there are only two alternatives for Hollywood. The movie industry should confine itself to entertainment alone and not deal with serious issues, or it should bring its tremendous power to bear in awakening the nation to an appreciation of its heritage, its traditions, and its might. It should acquaint the nation with the actual nature of the issue before Clark Gable is shown beating down panzer divisions single-handed. If Hollywood puts box-office receipts before that duty, the movie industry will deserve everything it gets—in restriction, censorship and ruin.

Views & Reviews

BY MICHAEL WILLIAMS

IN SEARCHING for a subject—or rather making a choice among many subjects—for this week's comments in this column, I found myself, finally, making a combination of three bits of reading matter which came together in a sort of pattern illustrating the deeper meaning of the crisis of our age. The first was the introduction in my missal to the section dealing with Advent, for yesterday was the beginning of a new ecclesiastical year and that fact had caused me once more to try, at least, to do what we Catholics are today being strongly urged by Mother Church to do, namely, to draw closer to the Liturgy and make some personal effort to understand it and apply its lessons. The second was a book review written by Dr. John Haynes Holmes, in the *Herald Tribune* book section of yesterday. The third was a news despatch from Berlin, sent by the Associated Press, also dealing with a book, one containing "the outline of a religious 'new order' for nazidom, replacing Catholic and Protestant churches with a national 'German faith.'"

According to the Berlin despatch the book which it briefly described, "Gott und Volk," or "God and People," is identical with the unnamed book recently mentioned by the German Catholic bishops in a letter read from church

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pulpits in which the bishops, according to the Associated Press despatch, "declared war on the drive toward a national religion" in Germany. "We Germans have been called by fate to be the first to break with Christianity," declared the book. "The existence of Christianity and the Church in Germany is at stake," declared the bishops.

Now let us turn to the book reviewed by Dr. Holmes. It is called "Biography of the Gods" and is by A. Eustace Haydon. Says the reviewer: "the thesis of this book is simple—that man creates his gods out of the needs and desires of his life. These deities, from the earliest tribal spirits to the God and Father of Jesus Christ, are only so many personifications or dramatizations of man's inner reaction upon the universe. Such reality as there is in them resides in the simple ideas and aspirations of man's mind. The gods spring from man rather than men from God. Professor Haydon, in other words, is a humanist who sees in religion only a phase, if a most exalted phase, of man's natural experience on the earth, and in theology only a rationalization of this experience."

Now let us turn to the missal. "The season of Advent," it says, "shows us that Christ is the center of the whole of the history of the world. It is with the expectation of His coming with grace that it begins, and with the realization of His coming with glory that it ends. And the aim of the Liturgy is that every generation of Christians shall play its part in the divine scheme."

And now for a comment by Dr. Holmes, who, as is well known, is far indeed from being a dogmatic, or liturgical, Christian, in the Catholic sense of those terms. Summing up his careful review of Professor Haydon's humanistic thesis—one that is very widely accepted in the world of secular scholarship, and far more widely diffused among great masses of the people everywhere—Dr. Holmes comments as follows: "Yet may one well pause before concluding that this is the last word. Gods die—but God seems in one form or another still to live. Is man quite so self-sufficient? Whence these 'moral values' for which he strives? Has it never occurred to Professor Haydon that this 'twilight of the gods' may be the tragic and terrible sign of the death of civilization? That the substitution of man for God may be the very secret of the world tragedy at this hour? Professor Haydon's 'biography' is of fascinating interest and abundant knowledge. But something seems to be wrong when we learn at the end of it all that it is the story not only of one who has died or is dying, but of one who has never lived."

When man makes his gods, as the learned Professor says is universally the case, why should not the nazis, as their authorized and government-supported propaganda and practice, destroy Christianity and "exalt love for Germany and fidelity to the Fuehrer" as the supreme new religion, and then carry the new god and his gospel of force on a mission of conquest of the world? "Der Fuehrer and his movement has come, decried as heretic, to perceive and form true divine will. Christianity has failed and thus rung in its death hour." So declares the nazi god-maker, and throughout the world there are millions of formerly Christian souls being prepared by the Professor Haydons for a similar movement.

The Stage & Screen

Grenville Vernon

I ENJOYED a theater-lobby acquaintance with Mr. Vernon which extended over the entire period of his service as dramatic critic for THE COMMONWEAL. We had many pleasant conversations together in the course of which I had not only the pleasure of sharing his enthusiasm for the theater but also profited from his knowledge and powers of discrimination. He brought to the criticism of the theater a genuine concern for the best and standards which made it possible for him to pass judgments based upon something more permanent than mere current fashion. His untimely death is a real loss to the contemporary theater, and he will be missed not only by his readers but also by those of us who knew him in his professional capacity. JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH.

Never a Dull Moment

IT IS regrettable that there aren't any new first-rate films to discuss in this theater and cinema issue. If this week's program proves anything, it is that the eye of the moving picture camera lights on an amazingly wide variety of subjects.

A new Garbo film is usually an event. It was headline news when the actress famed for passion and mystery spoke in her first talkie, laughed in her first comedy. Now her new comedy, in which she skis, swims, dances, gets drunk and carries on like a loose woman, has made news by being condemned not only by the Legion of Decency but also in a special pastoral letter of the Archbishop of New York. Full well might Greta Garbo feel let-down by the producers and by the raft of scriptwriters who concocted *"Two-Faced Woman."* For the picture is as stupidly inartistic as it is immoral. Its main plot is simply "The Guardsman" in reverse. Melvyn Douglas, vacationing in Idaho, makes such progress under his ski teacher that he marries her. But Garbo, a very outdoorsy and serious wife who doesn't like half-truths, quarrels with her new husband who can't decide whether he's a poet or a Napoleon of the publishing field. He returns to New York. She runs after him, pretending to be her indoorsy twin sister, and acts like an international trollop. He falls for the flashy, drinking, dancing, indecently dressed, promiscuous sister and goes back to Idaho to tell his wife that he's divorcing her. The picture strains so hard that it gets stuffy in its efforts to be adult and naughty. It has a few laughs, but its lines are appallingly weak.

"The Forgotten Village" shows how cinema's intelligentsia attack a serious subject. Although one trouble with the film is its intellectual emphasis and arty tone of cultured detachment, it also has moving beauty, particularly in Alexander Hackensmid's fine photography of the little Mexican village in the mountains and in John Steinbeck's straightforward, simple story of the backward villagers caught between superstition and modern science.

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Herbert Kline has done an amazing job in directing these Mexicans who are not actors, but inhabitants of the village living their daily lives before the camera. Burgess Meredith's excellent reading of the Steinbeck script is especially effective in the last half, in which the little boy makes his frightened trip to the city to secure medical aid when so many children are dying, not of the "airs" as the Wise Woman says, but because of the infected well. The villagers refuse the medicine; but the picture attempts to end on a hopeful note by sending the boy to the city to study so that he can teach his people and free them from superstition. The run-in with the New York censors was most unfortunate because the childbirth scene, while it is harrowing to watch, is not "indecent"; and there is about this unpretentious documentary film no aura of sensationalism usually attached to censored pictures. Catholics may rightly wish that the picture's producers had included a Catholic who would have clarified the film's confusion of superstition and religion and left no uncertainty as to the Church's abhorrence of superstition and willingness to work with science.

Then there are a couple of films about the birth of American jazz. *"Blues in the Night"* is a hopped-up melodrama, designed for adults, that uses dialogue packed with swing lingo, camera work flowing with the poetry of true cinema, an intelligent photomontage technique, good music to tell the story of an enthusiastic band of musicians who are unified by their love of blues and their desire to "give" with the real lowdown on rhythm. Its script has been tampered with too many times and its melodramatics go too far in trying to keep up with its own jazzy background. Anatole Litvak, emphasizing the love that boogie-woogie boys have for their kind of music, has directed his cast exceedingly well to meet the demands of fast theme and tempo. Richard Whorf, Elia Kazan, Jack Carson, Billy Halop and Peter Whitney make up the band; Priscilla Lane sings and fits well into their group. But evil slithers into this musical garden of unity when they play at The Jungle where Lloyd Nolan rules his sinister gang: Betty Field, Howard da Silva and Wally Ford. The performances are excellent; and Richard Whorf proves himself a valuable addition to filmdom in his first movie.

"Birth of the Blues," dedicated to those who took jazz out of the rut and put it in the groove, attempts to be historical but uses a musical comedy treatment of the subject. Although its chronology is considerably off and its story and dramatic situations are weak, it gets in there and strikes a mean blue note with its music. When Bing Crosby, Mary Martin, Eddie Anderson and Jack Teagarden's orchestra aren't helping Brian Donlevy, J. Carrol Naish et al with the plot, they are singing or playing old songs that swing you right into the aisle as you glow with nostalgia. "Waiting at the Church," "Wait Till the Sun Shines Nellie," "St. James Infirmary," "Memphis Blues," "St. Louis Blues," "The Birth of the Blues"

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should put anyone to yearning for those much missed "good old days." The main action takes place in 1910 and relates what a difficult time the boys had in selling audiences on blues, but Director Victor Schertzinger does not insist that we take the plot too seriously. Bing and Mary and Rochester are at their best. When Bing croons "Melancholy Baby" to little Carolyn Lee, you really believe he is Papa Crosby putting any one of his three youngsters beddy-bye.

There's another little item, one of those high spirited adventure numbers with heroes galore, a villain abducting the beautiful heroine, and a lot of stout fellas acting too brave for words. Considering that Walter Wanger spent good money on *"Sundown"* and filled his cast with names, he might have searched a little farther for an acceptable story. Barre Lyndon's screenplay about a British outpost near the Abyssinian border becomes downright laughable at times. The photography and exotic African noises are well done, but the hard working cast, under Director Henry Hathaway, can do nothing with this "Boy Scouts in Africa" kind of a script. Gene Tierney, Bruce Cabot, George Sanders, Harry Carey, Joseph Calleia, Reginald Gardiner try hard to get into the spirit of the thing. I thought this stuff about the British Empire being held together and Africa being saved for the British was out these days. The finale is a sermon preached by Sir Cedric Hardwicke in a shelled English church. His main point is that the Church holds the world together, the Army defends it, and the Crawfords (Bruce Cabot in this case) make it good. Wow! PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

No End of Books

By HARRY LORIN BINSSE

THE BOOK PUBLISHING business has always been seasonal; it seems ever to grow more so, with all the attendant headaches for the editors of weekly reviews. In July and August it is a problem to find enough new books to have a book review section; in November and December it is an even worse problem to find space to review even a fraction of what is published. Inevitably the seasoned judgments, carefully wrought, of our many kind collaborators begin to gather dust, and the flood mounts ever higher. At last it has seemed wise to resort to a poor expedient, but the best we know: to digest as fairly and briefly as may be a score or so of reviews which we think it would be foolish to hold longer in their entirety, so that readers may have benefit of our critics' labors without further delay. Here, too, is a supplement to our resumé of the publishing year (December 5), to serve as an additional guide for gift buyers.

First a handful of biographies. *Gustav Mahler* (by Bruno Walter; Greystone; $3.00) is a tribute to one of the great composers of the recent past. Says Claire Huchet Bishop: "What comes out of it all is that the value of Mahler's music does not reside in its newness but in the fact that the newness has become music. And at the bottom of this music is his spiritual torment: the problem of evil which he could not solve. After reading

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this book one wishes to hear Mahler's music again, which, after all, is the best result Bruno Walter could hope for." . . . Walt Whitman seems to have a perennial fascination that grows no less with time (*American Giant;* by Francis Winwar; Harper; $3.50). "Miss Winwar," as Cuthbert Wright points out, "has a literary passion for the major poets. . . . I have never been enamored of Miss Winwar's own prose, which has hitherto seemed to unite the art of saying unoriginal things about highly original men of letters with an air of delivering a coloratura solo. Yet it must be said of the bulk of this volume that it is chastened and readable in comparison with its author's previous studies of the Pre-Raphaelites or of Oscar Wilde." . . . Finley Peter Dunne succeeded in making himself at least a minor prophet and a major Will Rogers for a long generation of Americans (*Mr. Dooley's America;* by Elmer Ellis; Knopf; $3.00). Neil MacNeil raises a question about him: "Perhaps it is still too early to make a final appraisal of Dunne; he is still close to us. He wrote the best of his work in dialect, and dialect literature is not noted for its longevity. . . . Mr. Ellis concludes that 'one cannot help but believe that those dialect essays that deal with timeless subjects will never cease to find some admiring readers.' Let us leave it at that." Mr. MacNeil himself concludes: "Dunne was at his best when he had Mr. Dooley debunking the demagogues and stuffed shirts of politics and finance, espousing the fight of the underprivileged and the wrong, or acting as a censor of the morals of his time. He was at his best when he drew liberally on his Irish Catholic background and the wisdom of his people. Then he had a beneficent influence on men and events."

Two other newspaper men have been put on display for our amusement and edification. *William Allen White of Emporia* (by Frank C. Clough; Whittlesey: $2.50) is an associate's biography of his boss. "This book," writes Albert Eisele, "is more than a clear delineation of William Allen White. It is also a clear delineation of the editor of the average small-town daily. . . . It should be valuable to all small-town editors, whether in the daily or weekly field. The chapter 'A Paper's Character Develops' should bolster and fortify many an editor's belief in how to run a paper. There is glowing warmth in the chapter 'Mary and Bill.' " . . . Emile Gauvreau at 50 has written his autobiography (*My Last Million Readers;* Dutton; $3.00). Who, you may wonder, is Mr. Gauvreau? He has been managing editor of the Hartford *Courant,* editor of the New York *Evening Graphic, Mirror,* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer.* Says our own John Brubaker, "There must be a balcony in heaven where the non-orthodox whose hearts, nevertheless, are in the right place may enjoy some limited reward. Such a non-conformist is Emile Gauvreau, son of a French Canadian factory worker and product of the sweat shop journalism of pre-World-War-I New Haven, who became one of the leading exponents of New York tabloidiana in the twenties and thirties. . . . A guess might be ventured that, as a personal history, 'My Last Million Readers' will yet be regarded as one of the significant revelations of our recent prosperity era, written by an intelligent individual of good principles, who refused to be

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completely taken in." . . . Skipping back a good dozen decades we have a group portrait (*Twelve Who Ruled;* by R. R. Palmer; Princeton; $3.75). Our critic is W. M. Frohock: "The twelve who ruled were the Committee of Public Safety and their instrument of rule was the Terror. They took over the French Revolution when it was ready to fall into anarchy and saved it from Scylla only to run firmly into Charybdis; before Robespierre and his colleagues stepped down, they had prepared their country for the military dictatorship which threw Europe into twenty years of war. . . . Mr. Palmer, who is also the author of 'Catholics and Unbelievers in Eighteenth Century France,' handles his materials dexterously. . . . He never misses an opportunity to draw a parallel between Europe then and now. And from his work a moral gradually emerges—Berlin papers please copy!—the higher they go, the harder they come down."

Biography naturally slides over into history, and the news of the day calls attention to a biography and a history which otherwise would be of interest only to specialists. *A History of Ukraine* (by Michael Hrushevsky; Yale; $4.00), is, as Theodore M. Avery, Jr., points out, "a translation of the popular history by the scholarly patriarch of the Ukrainian national movement. It was originally published in 1911, but additional material brings the narrative almost to the present. A popular history in the true sense of the word, it outlines almost every phase of political, social and cultural life; and this together with the erudition and mature judgment of the author, and the splendid work of the editor and translators, makes it one of the most satisfactory national histories in our language." *Bohdan, Hetman of Ukraine* (by George Vernadsky; Yale; $2.50) is published under the same auspices and details the life of a seventeenth century national hero. Mr. Avery calls it "adequate" and "interesting." . . . *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* (Volume I, The Agrarian Life of the Middle Ages; Edited by J. H. Clapham and Eileen Power; Macmillan; $7.50) is a triumph of British and European scholarship in the midst of catastrophe. "Some collaborators disappeared," reports Walter John Marx, "others were mobilized and are now in prison camps—or dead. . . . This will probably be for many years the definitive history of medieval agrarian life." And the chief moral: "The middle ages apparently have little to teach us in regard to stemming adequately the concentration of landed wealth in the hands of the few." . . . *Thailand, the New Siam* (by Virginia Thompson; Macmillan; $5.00) jumps as far geographically as does the former volume temporally. Max Fischer qualifies his admiration of the book: "Miss Thompson seems to have no knowledge of the Siamese language, no personal experience of long standing in the country of which she writes, and no special views of her own. . . . She underestimates the Japanese influence already prevailing in that country; certainly she is wrong in not taking seriously Tokyo's interest in the isthmus of Kra. Yet this is the first reference book in English which offers a complete survey of the problems of the Siamese state and will prove very useful to all who consult it on current conditions in Thailand." (*To be continued.*)

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Books of Week

Theater

Three Plays. William Saroyan. The Beautiful People, Sweeney in the Trees, Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning. Harcourt. $3.00.
Producing the Play. John Gassner. Together with the New Scene Technicians Handbook. Philip Barber. Dryden Press. $3.25.

WILLIAM SAROYAN'S plays are suited to the theater; they are also suited to perusal in the quiet of the study. They are literary as well as theatrical productions. This is the reason that they stand head and shoulders above the plays of any American dramatist who has appeared in the last decade. This fact is emphasized by the publication of three more of his plays, or rather by two of them, for "Sweeney in the Trees" quite baffled me in its reading. But "The Beautiful People" only increased and broadened the delight I experienced on seeing it in the theater, and "Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning," not yet produced in New York though it has been in Pasadena, is a truly gorgeous comedy. In "The Beautiful People" Mr. Saroyan shows that he can write a love scene as no living dramatist can write one, with poetry, fancy and a tenderness extraordinary in this hard, material age. Mr. Saroyan is a romantic, born, let us hope, not after his time, but before it. There are in his emotions a nobility, a goodness, a scorn of the mean which seems an anomaly today. Moreover he has a hilarious sense of humor. Some of this latter is in "The Beautiful People" but more in "Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning." What will he not do with these two qualities once he has set himself to the hard business of coherent, logical thought? Mr. Saroyan has the genius; will he acquire the patience, the ability for taking infinite pains without which genius is often dissipated before it reaches the heights it might attain? But let us be thankful that he has given us this year so imaginative a play as "The Beautiful People" and so amusing and original a one as "Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning."

John Gassner is probably the foremost authority on the history of the drama living in America. But he is more than that; he is also a practical man of the theater. This he shows in no uncertain way in his latest book, "Producing the Play." In it his own synthesis is apparent; in his own words it pays "equal attention to the soul and the matter, the mind and the hands, of play production." Moreover to make it the more authoritative Mr. Gassner introduces a number of selections written specially for the book by masters in their own fields, notably "What Is Direction, Anyhow?" by George Kaufman, "Acting and the Training of the Actor" by Lee Strasburg, "Rhythmic Movement in the Actor's Art" by Ernst T. Ferand, "The Stage Manager as Co-ordinator" by John Haggott, "Directing the Play" by Worthington Miner, "The Principles of Interpretation" by Harold Clurman, "Form in Production" by Robert Lewis, "Designing the Play" by Mordecai Gorelik, "Lighting the Play" by A. Feder, "Make-Up for the Play" by Kenneth Buckridge, "The Technique of Comedy Direction" by Alfred De Liagre, Jr., "Directing Old and New Poetic Drama" by Guthrie McClintic, "On Directing Shakespeare" by Margaret Webster, "Revivals" by John Houseman, "Music in the Theater" by Marc Blitzstein, "Dance in

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Plays" by George Beiswanger, "Everyman's Ziegfeld" by Charles Friedman, "Radio in the College Theater" by Walter P. Eaton, and "Directing the Radio Play" by Earle McGill. And then of course there is the whole second portion of the book, Mr. Barber's exhaustive handbook of the technique of play production. In short the book is invaluable not only for the directors of little theaters, of college theaters, and for students of the drama, but also for Broadway directors and producers. It is encyclopedic in its scope, and yet clearly and incisively written so that it will be attractive even to the layman.

GRENVILLE VERNON.

Advance from Broadway. 19,000 *Miles of American Theican Theater. Norris Houghton. Harcourt.* $3.00.

A COLLEGE PRESIDENT is on record as saying: "I can tell at commencement which girl has majored in drama because I can see in her eyes an awareness of the moment." This "awareness," or some similar attribute, seems to have captivated the educational vision, and ever since that momentous year 1905, when Professor Baker inaugurated his 47 Drama Workshop at Harvard, a cultural cloudburst of drama has begun to flood our high schools, colleges and universities with minor typhoons among the granges, civic centers and social agencies. Harvard, having permitted the 47 Workshop to remove itself to Yale, now stands almost alone with Princeton with a dramaless curriculum. While this surge of theoretic theater engulfs faculties and students, the actual theater has inversely dwindled; in 1890 there were 5,000 commercial theaters in the country, by 1939 there were 192, two-thirds of which were on Broadway, out of reach, physically and financially, of all but a handful of our population. Thus, because it is obligatory for most teachers of drama to have a college degree and not essential to have had actual stage experience, it seems likely that very many of both our students and teachers have probably never been inside a professional theater and that dramatics may soon be evaluated on the "artsy-crafty" basis of vocational training.

In place of the stock companies which once supplied entertainment for former generations, there have now sprung into being—in modest competition with the cinema—the playhouses and little theaters. Mr. Houghton classifies as playhouses those small professional summer theaters which are now acquiring profit and standardization with a stellar circuit of plays endorsed by Broadway. The little theater implies an amateur company. Between the two are the few with semi-professional casts like the Pittsburgh Playhouse, Charleston's Dock Street Theater and the two little theater giants, the Cleveland and the Pasadena Playhouses. So far none of these groups has developed a local playwright. The only repertory company seems to be Jasper Deeter's Hedgerow Theater near Philadelphia. The author does not think that Indianapolis and Denver are justified in adding "civic" to the titles of their little theaters, since they reach so small a portion of the cities' population, but the municipal recreation departments of Palo Alto, California, and Houston, Texas, have hatched more genuine community players. The latter now is independent of the municipal government and under the leadership of Miss Margo has become one of the most progressive groups in the country with a habit of selling out the house with the classics while many of the richer little theaters can only function on the froth of Broadway. State theater projects are also being developed by the Universities of Wisconsin, North Dakota, Delaware and North Carolina and in New York State, where a survey discovered 2,300 small drama producing units. Cornell, backed by the Rockefeller Foundation, is attempting to develop amateur dramatists, making use of local material.

Mr. Houghton's survey is intelligent and readable but we are disappointed that he found no place to mention any Catholic little theater except in a footnote. He is disappointed in the lack of accomplishment of the American National Theater and the small accomplishment of the National Theater Conference. Perhaps the Catholic Theater Conference may surprise him. Nor did the close of his trip across the continent leave him with any rosy vision of the real American theater but constrained him to ask of Paul Green as they sat on his porch in Chapel Hill, the home of the University of North Carolina Playmakers, "What good does it do anyway for youngsters to act poor plays rather poorly and drag other people out to see them?" Mr. Green considered the landscape. "Do you see that scrub growth over there?" he said. "It's not much good in itself, but it will be next year's mould, and our theatrical soil needs a lot of fertilizing before it produces an oak."

E. V. R. WYATT.

Hollywood: The Movie Colony, The Movie Makers. Leo C. Rosten. Harcourt. $4.00.

THE NAME "Hollywood" provokes either amusement or indignation—because in few areas of American life is there such a miasma of myths and misconceptions as that which surrounds this Bagdad-on-the-Pacific. This volume, in which Leo Rosten places Hollywood under the X-ray instead of the spotlight, is the result of three years of research and observation by the author and a staff of social scientists whose study was made possible through Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundation grants. Its measurement, documentation, cogent insight and conclusions make it the best report on Hollywood to date. Even leaving the economics of movie making, censorship, the Hays Office and labor problems to a future volume, this book with last year's "The Rise of the American Film" by Lewis Jacobs provides a complete background for an understanding of the American position in the important art of the cinema.

One realizes the bigness of the movie industry, and regards it with some respect, when one contemplates its figures. Hollywood produces 90 percent of all the films made in America, and United States supplies 65 percent of all the films used in the world. Ranked according to volume of US business, motion picture production in 1937 was fourteenth, and according to assets, eleventh. In 1940, five out of the 15 highest salaries in this country went to movie people. But in his chapter on "The Big Money," in which he discusses how large salaries are earned and spent, Mr. Rosten shows us that a great number of Hollywood workers do not receive staggering incomes. He further points out: "An accurate arrangement of American Croesuses would put the movie élite" at the modest end of the scale. In 1940 Bing Crosby paid an income tax of $377,000. So, "the income tax on a Hollywood salary is not to be laughed off lightly—but neither is the amount left after taxes have been paid."

In the second part of his book Mr. Rosten analyzes the movie makers, specifically the producers, directors, writers and actors; and he gives the most thorough picture ever drawn of their duties, salaries, lives. He names names,

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omits no facts necessary to a well rounded knowledge of the kind of people who make our movies. But the first half of the book, devoted to the movie colony, its legends, caste system, mores, publicity, night life, politics, homes and phobias is the most interesting and revealing discussion of Hollywood ever to be written. Because one gets lopsided impressions of Hollywoodian love and heartbreak from the columnists, because yellow journalism has always pictured Hollywood as the setting for a contemporary Decameron, this part of the book is most important.

In no other community are trivia reported on so intensely; and never before in history has so immature a group been so famous and had such incomes. Mr. Rosten does not whitewash the movie colony. He admits its members "are characterized by showmanship, not breeding; glibness, not wisdom; audacity, not poise." They have sought much of the publicity that now reacts like a boomerang. They are nervous about the power of the screen because they are not sure how to use it. The divorce data, which was the most difficult to obtain, indicates that one out of every three marriages has probably ended in divorce. Hollywood's upper crust are *nouveaux riches* who express their wealth by building homes of unnecessary magnitude and splendor, who are snobbish in their social system, who use bravado to cover up their uncertainty. Although the movie people are exposed on more fronts than are any other group, their happy marriages and normal lives get no publicity. In recent years the Hollywood élite (which consists of some 250 actors, producers, directors, writers of prestige, influence and wealth) has become dissatisfied with its own culture and envious of others. Hollywood is full of characters in search of character. Even after the clean-up of morals which followed the hey-hey days of the early twenties, the unpleasant legends about movie people continued. Now the colony is trying to live down the unsavory stories and such wisecracks as "Hollywood is only a state of mind." Furthermore there is a rising sense of craftsmanship and merit, a search for integrity rather than pretension. Mr. Rosten points out that every 400 through the ages "went Hollywood." With its number of boy geniuses, fabulous salaries, instability, trumped-up publicity, the great wonder is that Hollywood is sane at all. Now that Hollywood is growing up, dropping some of its isolation and showing an interest in art and politics, its community will be looked upon with more than leering interest. But even here it must be careful, because Hollywood politics is played by the most famous cast in the world. The book's figures on educational backgrounds will surprise readers who thought the film colony was illiterate.

If "Hollywood" were read by all the Fanny Joneses who believe that only luck is necessary to land in pictures and that all the actresses follow the waitress-to-movie-queen pattern, it would be worth its weight in gold. But unfortunately the Fanny Joneses won't read this book. They would be frightened by its pages of statistics and well documented appendices. In the hands of many another writer these could be forbidding, but in the fluid, snappy prose of Leo Rosten (whom you may know better as Leonard Q. Ross, the author of the Hyman Kaplan stories) the facts and figures make fascinating reading. I wish he could have included more about the religious beliefs of the movie group, but perhaps that discussion will follow in the later volume. He has already done much to make an honest woman out of Hollywood. He closes his study (and it is a "study," not a "peepshow") with a chapter on "The Long Arm of Hollywood" which will frighten any philosophers who are not already aware of cinema's far-reaching influence. His final sentence includes an apt quotation from Mortimer J. Adler: the movies are "more than any other art the social and political problem of our day." PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Heart of Europe: Switzerland. Denis de Rougemont and Charlotte Muret. Duell. $2.50.

WHAT would most of us have to remember of Switzerland if Switzerland were to go? A country is like a man we have met and do not know: when we hear that a country has been partitioned or that a man is dead we say: he used to be in insurance, the Swiss made cheese, he used to be a salesman, the Swiss made watches, he lived in California, the Swiss had lakes, mountains and winter sports—he's dead now and what of it? I miss my Swiss. It happens that such memories of mere appearance—this collection of postcards—are insufficient. It happens that, in justice, the communities of men which form nations have a claim on other communities to be understood, a claim that what they bring to the community of the world be assayed.

For four hundred, five, six hundred years the people of Switzerland—delegates from three great European cultures—built their country, cemented a confederation of states, bound together in accepted union men who spoke three languages, defended the liberties of these men, defended their right to think within the framework of Germanic culture, their right to an autonomous and adult share in French culture—they provided Rousseau, received Calvin—their right to participate in Italian culture. This was their almost incredible success: that they made it possible for some people, somewhere in Europe, to be European. What is the story of this diversity in union? Denis de Rougemont and Charlotte Muret have written it down so that we may know what will be lost if Switzerland goes under, what might be won were the model provided by Swiss federative wisdom to be followed in founding the new Europe.

The authors have not told this story in terms of political or economic doctrine although political history and economic facts are in their book. There is nothing abstruse in the manner in which they look at this living organism: they have an immediate feeling for the life of the Swiss in the past and in the present. All the great figures of the past are there and the wars and what they meant. Nicolas de Flue is there and the crisis in which Switzerland risked destruction, forgetful of her mission and tempted to enter into the orbit of European nationalisms. The authors give the proud list of artists and scientists, poets and thinkers that Swiss culture has contributed to Europe throughout the centuries, acting in every field, acting on every European problem, sensitive to and reacting in the presence of every crisis in European development, yet Swiss and independent. But where this book makes an invaluable contribution to our awareness of Switzerland is in the remarkable characterization of the Swiss people of today. Here there is great skill, great understanding. Armed, yet pacific, close to their towns, their land, their rights, yet thinking in terms of all Europe, diverse in character, obstinately regional in sympathy, yet united, and giving promise of a wider continental unity, the Swiss people are presented to us in this book. C. G. PAULDING.

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The Inner Forum

THE NEW YORK productions of the Blackfriars' Guild this season are the culmination of ten years' preparation. Sean Vincent's "Up the Rebels" which played at the Blackfriars' Theater on 57 Street just off Broadway October 30 to November 2 was so popular that an extra performance was required. Felix Doherty's "Song Out of Sorrow," the subject of which is Francis Thompson, is scheduled for a more ambitious run at the same theater, December 11-18. More than 300 scripts were submitted in response to a single circular letter. Within the first three days 160 actors and actresses answered a brief notice in the papers.

The Blackfriars movement began ten years ago in a parish hall in Washington, D. C., with a rather hectic production of Philip Barry's "Holiday." As the seminary students interested completed their studies and went to their respective posts in various cities throughout the country, the movement spread. The Dominican Fathers have now established local chapters of the Guild in twenty-five different American cities.

In addition to establishing these little theaters, the Guild conducts an Institute of Speech and Drama at the Catholic University in Washington. This has recently become a regular department at the University, a school of speech and drama. Last summer they experimented with summer theater at Nanhasset, Mass. (near Lowell), and the Catholic Summer School of America at Cliff Haven, New York. The Guild found this latter sphere of activity disappointing in that summer people appeared to be too exclusively bent on being merely entertained.

Blackfriars conceives of its function as ultimately somewhat the same as that of the Yiddish and the Moscow Art Theaters. While the Guild plans to produce a number of plays of Catholic inspiration, it works on the general principle that the stage is not the best place for a tract or a sermon. On the other hand it is primarily concerned that the wide range of current problems which comprise the theme of many of its plays be solved along the lines of Catholic traditions. And its genre is adult, as opposed to adolescent drama. The Guild endeavors to develop competent playwrights, producers, actors and stage technicians and to raise the public taste.

CONTRIBUTORS

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John GOLDEN has done very nearly everything in theaters: he has been a playwright, designed scenery, written songs (about 1,000 of them), acted and, of course, produced. It would be almost impertinent to list a few of his successful productions without listing them all; presently running is "Claudia."

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